

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Officials: Troop drawdown to be slowed

*The Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration is abandoning plans to cut the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan to 5,500 by year's end, bowing to military leaders who want to keep more troops, including many into the 2016 fighting season, U.S. officials say.

While no final decision on numbers has been made, the officials said the administration is poised to slow withdrawal plans and probably will allow many of the 9,800 American troops to remain well into next year.

There also are discussions about keeping a steady number of counterterrorism troops into 2015, including options under which some would remain in the country or nearby beyond 2016.

Currently, about 2,000 U.S. troops are conducting counterterrorism missions, and mili-

tary leaders have argued that they will need to continue pursuing the remnants of al-Qaida and to monitor Islamic State militants looking to recruit in Afghanistan.

Officials say President Barack Obama probably will use a Washington visit by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani this month as the time to announce his decision on a new withdrawal timeline.

U.S. officials familiar with the debate said it's not clear yet whether the White House will agree to a small, symbolic decrease by the end of this year or insist on a larger cut. They note that there is some stiff opposition to any change, largely from National Security Adviser Susan Rice.

In recent weeks, Pentagon leaders, including Defense Secretary Ash Carter, have acknowledged the discussions

about slowing the pace of troop withdrawal. But they are increasingly confident that the military will get its way and will keep a robust force in Afghanistan beyond year's end.

The administration, however, has shown no inclination so far for going beyond 2016; that's a hard line drawn by the president when he announced the withdrawal plan.

The 2016 deadline is considered a politically crucial national security goal for Obama, who promised to get all troops out by the end of his presidency, ending America's longest war.

Obama, who also pledged to end the war in Iraq, has had to send troops back there to help Iraqi security forces fight Islamic State militants. So his promise to withdraw troops from Afghanistan has taken on more political importance.

Military leaders want to keep

what they consider a "modest" number of troops in Afghanistan longer in order to protect America's investment and provide as much training and advice as possible to Afghan forces. Maintaining a more stable number of troops, military leaders have argued, would allow better support of the Afghans during this summer's fighting season and better prepare them for 2016 battles.

Members of Congress, including Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, also have expressed concerns about a sharp drawdown this year. During a hearing last month, McCain said a lack of presence in Afghanistan would create a vacuum and "allow terrorists to foment the same disaster in Afghanistan as we have seen in Iraq — growing instability, terrorist safe havens and direct threats to the United States."

## Critics denounce Obama's cautious war strategy

*Bloomberg News*

WASHINGTON — Days after Ashton Carter became Defense secretary, he huddled with 30 American diplomats and generals on a U.S. Army base in Kuwait to review President Barack Obama's plan for battling Islamic State.

**ANALYSIS** Emerging from the six-hour meeting, Carter delivered his verdict: The U.S., he said, has "the ingredients" of a strategy.

That less-than-stellar endorsement of the president's response to a major security threat comes six months after Obama promised to "degrade and ultimately destroy" the self-proclaimed Islamic caliphate. As the Islamic State group vows

to consolidate its rule, Obama's plan is being criticized on both political and military grounds.

While the struggle against the extremists offers few good choices, Obama's centralized management style and reliance upon aides who lack significant Middle East or military experience have fueled the problem, critics say. A White House bureaucracy that slows decisions, and Obama's determination to avoid a new ground war, also contribute to what the skeptics call paralysis.

"We have a public-relations strategy, not a geopolitical war-fighting strategy," said Bing West, a former Marine who worked in the Ronald Reagan-era Pentagon.

As the U.S. ponders its next

steps, Iran is solidifying its role as the dominant influence on Iraq, joining Shiite militias in a battle for Tikrit, a Sunni-majority city about 100 miles northwest of Baghdad. American air power, which has been active in northern Iraq, isn't involved.

The administration has repeatedly caused difficulties for itself. On Feb. 19, the Pentagon sketched for reporters the outlines of a campaign to begin evicting Islamic State fighters from Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, as early as April.

It quickly became clear that the Iraqi army was in no shape to attack on that schedule. The director of the Defense Intelligence Agency told Congress it would take six to nine months to assemble the needed combat

power.

And after Obama last year ruled out the use of American ground troops, saying "we're not going to allow ourselves to be dragged back," Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said some U.S. soldiers might be needed to direct airstrikes as the Iraqis advanced.

Administration officials say they are making headway. More than 2,600 airstrikes by the U.S. and its European and Arab allies have killed about 8,500 Islamic State warriors, according to U.S. Central Command and the administration.

The Pentagon estimates current Islamic State manpower at 25,000 to 31,000, with about two-thirds of that in Syria.

## VA delays Agent Orange decision for C-123 vets

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The VA said Friday no date has been set for a decision on whether to award benefits for Agent Orange exposure to Air Force reservists who flew C-123 aircraft contaminated with the herbicide.

The department is weighing the issue after a recent study confirmed the possibility of health risks as well as lobbying from veterans' groups and former crewmembers. But it did not plan to make an announcement this week, despite an earlier indication by VA officials, spokeswoman Meagan Lutz said.

There is no definite timeline for a decision, she said.

Veterans say herbicide residue left inside the aircraft from service during the Vietnam War sickened them and they deserve the VA health care coverage for Agent Orange-related conditions extended to nearly all servicemembers deployed to the war zone.

The C-123s were used to

spray during Operation Ranch Hand and later were brought back to the United States and repurposed as military cargo aircraft. About 1,500 to 2,100 personnel flew and trained on the C-123 aircraft from the early 1970s to the 1980s.

An Institute of Medicine study stoked the debate in January when it found that herbicide residue inside the planes could have exposed reservists to the disease-causing dioxins found in Agent Orange.

"It is plausible that, at least in some cases ... the reservists' exposure exceeded health guidelines for workers in enclosed settings," the researchers wrote. "Thus, some reservists quite likely experienced non-trivial increases in their risks of adverse health outcomes."

VA Undersecretary for Benefits Allison Hickey told Stars and Stripes last week that the department had planned to announce a decision on the benefits but was delaying it until Tuesday or Wednesday, though that never materialized.

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## Salvage crew at site of helo crash in Fla.

*The Associated Press*

TAMPA, Fla. — A salvage barge moved off the Florida Panhandle coast to lift the wreckage of a shattered Black Hawk helicopter from the waters, days after seven Marines and four soldiers were killed when the aircraft crashed in dense fog on a nighttime training mission.

Air Force spokeswoman Sara Vidoni said the barge arrived about midday Friday to pluck the debris from about 25 feet of water. The salvage operation opened on a day a military leader in North Carolina disclosed that those aboard the aircraft had tried to abort their mission when they decided it was too risky.

Maj. Gen. Joseph L. Osterman — commander of Marine Corps special operations forces — said the Marines had been flying offshore before early Tuesday's crash to practice rappelling down ropes into the water and then making for land. He didn't know whether the Marines had been planning to reach shore by swimming or in small rubber boats, but the same drill had been practiced in daylight.

"They literally had done it hours before in daylight as part of the rehearsal for being able to do the nighttime operations, which inherently are more difficult," Osterman said at a news conference at Camp Lejeune,

N.C.

The teams of Marines and Army-piloted choppers made a judgment call on whether conditions were sufficient for the training mission to go ahead, he noted. Then when they were heading out to start the mission, they tried to abort after deciding it was too risky, Osterman said.

The seven Marines were members of the same team who constantly trained and faced danger together as part of the Marine Special Operations Command, or MARSOC, which totals about 2,500 troops.

Among those killed was Staff Sgt. Andrew Seif, 26, who had been awarded the Silver Star, one of the military's highest honors, for heroism only days earlier. He had been commended for his efforts to save a mortally wounded friend in heavy gunfire in Afghanistan.

The other Marines were identified as: Capt. Stanford Henry Shaw III of Basking Ridge, N.J.; Master Sgt. Thomas Saunders of Camp Lejeune; Staff Sgt. Liam Flynn of Queens, N.Y.; Staff Sgt. Trevor P. Blaylock of Lake Orion, Mich.; Staff Sgt. Kerry Michael Kemp of Port Washington, Wis.; and Staff Sgt. Marcus Bawol from Warren, Mich.

Four National Guard soldiers from Louisiana also were killed, though they've not yet been publicly identified.

## Cyclone pummels Vanuatu

*The Associated Press*

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — Residents in cyclone-ravaged Vanuatu hunkered in emergency shelters for a second straight night Saturday after venturing out to find their homes damaged or blown away by the storm, aid workers said.

Cyclone Pam tore through the tiny South Pacific archipelago early Saturday, leaving a trail of destruction and unconfirmed reports of dozens of deaths.

Power remained out across Vanuatu later Saturday and people on many of the outer islands had no access to running water or outside communications, said Chloe Morrison, a World Vision emergency com-

munications officer in the capital, Port Vila.

Morrison said communications have been so problematic that her aid group hasn't yet been able to account for many of its own 76 staff on the islands and authorities have been unable to assess the extent of the damage.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said the impact and scope of the disaster caused by the cyclone wasn't yet clear, but he feared the damage and destruction could be widespread.

"We hope the loss of life will be minimal," he said during the World Conference on Disaster Risk and Reduction in Japan. The U.N. said it was preparing to deploy emergency rapid response units.

## Social Security data says 6.5M in US reach age 112

WASHINGTON — Americans are getting older, but not this old: Social Security records show that 6.5 million people in the U.S. have reached the ripe old age of 112.

In reality, only a few could possibly be alive. As of last fall, there were only 42 people known to be that old in the entire world. But Social Security does not have death records for

millions of these people, with the oldest born in 1869, according to a report by the agency's inspector general.

Only 13 of the people are still getting Social Security benefits, the report said. But for others, their Social Security numbers are still active, so a number could be used to report wages, open bank accounts, obtain credit cards or claim fraudulent tax refunds.

From The Associated Press

# Wild offseason so far in NFL

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Maybe everyone should have known from the way the Super Bowl ended that the beginning of the NFL's business season would be wild.

Chip Kelly made one stunning move after another. The normally free-spending Cowboys let DeMarco Murray, the league's top offensive player, walk — to Kelly and division rival Philadelphia.

Three players retired in their primes. The Colts loaded up on veterans, a clear message they believe 2015 is their year to make super things happen.

Then the Jets brought back the two key players from their outstanding secondary under Rex Ryan. But wait, Ryan is now in Buffalo, remaking the Bills' roster. And the Dolphins added Ndamukong Suh. All three teams want to mount some sort of challenge to the Patriots.

Things should slow down now, although who really knows given the frantic nature of this week?

"This is a process that goes all the way through until the trading deadline stops, and (then) there's no moves until the season's over," says Broncos boss John Elway. "It's a process. It just slows down. Now you get out of the frenzy of everything, and you can get back to reality and try to find some good football players."

Some observations on all that frenzied action:

**Playing all his chips:** Giving Kelly the keys to the kingdom in Philly after he won his power struggle with GM Howie Roseman led to the kind of bartering rarely seen in the NFL. Kelly fully believes in the offensive system he brought from Oregon and has gone 20-12 in his two regular seasons with the Eagles. His vision of the players he wants is undeterred by cost — QB Sam Bradford brings a \$16.58 million cap hit; RB Murray will get \$42 million over five years.

Not only is Kelly changing the face of

his franchise by moving around so many pieces, he might be altering the way teams look at making trades. As the salary cap continues to rise through the remaining six years of the labor agreement and all 32 clubs have more spending power, bold steps (leaps really) could become less frightening throughout the NFL.

**All-in in Indy:** The Colts have a budding superstar quarterback in Andrew Luck. They have a strong coaching staff led by Chuck Pagano and have systematically rebuilt the roster since Peyton Manning left.

After making the playoffs the last three years and advancing one step further each time, they believe a Super Bowl trip is their 2015 destiny. So GM Ryan Grigson has surrounded Luck and some of his younger regulars with a slew of veterans.

Luck gets a Hall of Fame caliber receiver in Andre Johnson, and a workhouse runner in Frank Gore. Both bring solid leadership to the clubhouse.

They also brought in safety Mike Adams, linebacker Trent Cole, defensive end Kendall Langford and guard Todd Herremans.

Super Bowl or bust? Could be for Indy.

**Out of here:** With all this money being thrown around, it was somewhat surprising that three players nowhere near the end of their productive football years called it quits.

Perennial Pro Bowl LB Patrick Willis left millions on the table in departing the 49ers after a borderline Hall of Fame quality eight pro seasons. Steelers free agent LB Jason Worilds likely would have gotten a very nice contract somewhere. And Jake Locker's upside at age 26 was enchanting in a quarterback-driven sport.

Each of them felt they either weren't healthy enough or passionate enough to keep going.

**How 'bout them nonspending Cowboys?:** Maybe the most puzzling approach to free agency came out of Dallas. Owner Jerry Jones has never met a talented, high-priced free agent he wasn't enamored of. Yet, in great part due to the clear-headed persuasiveness of his son, team COO Stephen Jones, the Cowboys have been quiet. They kept All-Pro WR Dez Bryant, their top priority, but that deal and previous contracts put them in salary cap purgatory. Stephen Jones seems determined to get the Cowboys out of it.

**Division races:** With months of free agency to come, and the draft on April 30-May 2, there are plenty of off-field machinations ahead. But so far, it appears the three pretenders in the AFC East have closed in a bit on New England. The balance of power in the NFC East might have gone with Murray from Dallas to Philly.

Green Bay got its most important business done by keeping WR-KR Randall Cobb and still is the NFC North power. No team in the NFC South particularly stepped up.

Seattle, winner of the last two conference crowns and 1-1 in Super Bowls, should be even stronger on offense with the addition of star TE Jimmy Graham and the retention of RB Marshawn Lynch. The rough NFC West remains the Seahawks' kingdom.

Kansas City could actually have a receiver who can score touchdowns in Jeremy Maclin, and it held on to sackmaster LB Justin Houston. Still, it doesn't look like anyone in the AFC West made big strides to catch Denver.

Same in the AFC South, with Houston far in Indy's review mirror. The most impactful move in the AFC North could be RB Justin Forsett returning to Baltimore.

Of course, check back in a few weeks — when Kelly might have made another dozen deals.

## Shiffrin captures her fourth slalom of year

ARE, Sweden — American Mikaela Shiffrin won her fourth World Cup slalom race of the season on Saturday, beating Slovakia's Veronika Velez Zuzulova by 1.41 seconds.

Sarka Strachova of the Czech Republic was third, 2.15 back.

Shiffrin, who was in the lead after the first run, lost some time on the top of the hill but recovered in the bottom half to clock the fastest time in the second leg as well.

The result means Shiffrin extended her lead over Sweden's Frida Hansdotter in the overall slalom standings to 90 points with one race remaining.

Hansdotter was sixth in Are, 2.54 behind Shiffrin. The only way for her to get the crystal globe for slalom now is if she wins the final race in Meribel while Shiffrin fails to make the top 20.

"I will do what I can," Hansdotter said. "But she is fantastic and in a class of her own right now."

Shiffrin, who turned 20 on Friday, has won four of the last five World Cup slalom races. She also defended her gold medal in slalom at the World Championships last month.

"I'm trying to do each run like it's my last run and put all my heart into it," she said after her first run. "I really don't want to have any regrets."

In other skiing news:

■ Alexis Pinturault of France won a World Cup giant slalom Saturday at Kranjska Gora, Slovenia, while Marcel Hirscher of Austria came second to take the season's discipline title with a race to spare.

Pinturault extended his first-run lead to finish in a total time of 2 minutes, 19.78 seconds, 0.68 ahead of Hirscher. It was the Frenchman's ninth career win but first in GS since February 2013.

Pinturault's compatriot Thomas Fanara came 0.94 back in third, while fourth-place Ted Ligety of the United States trailed by 1.88.

With only next week's season-ending race in Meribel remaining, Hirscher holds an insurmountable 185-point lead over Pinturault in the GS rankings.

Hirscher also tops the overall standings.

# Roethlisberger signs 5-year extension

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers spent the first frenzied days of free agency doing what they always do: watching other teams reach deep into their wallets to gamble on talented players they hope will put them over the top.

That's not how things work in Pittsburgh. The defending AFC North champions have won more Super Bowl trophies than any other franchise by focusing on keeping their own. When the fit is right, the price tag is never too high.

No wonder Ben Roethlisberger couldn't keep the smile off his face.

The Steelers and their franchise quarterback agreed on a new 5-year contract on Friday that could keep him in black-and-gold for the rest of the decade and almost certainly the remainder of his already remarkable career.

Financial details were not immediately available.

## Stills dealt to Miami, Wallace to join Vikes

MIAMI — With two trades Friday, the Miami Dolphins swapped receivers: Kenny Stills for Mike Wallace.

First the Dolphins obtained Stills from the New Orleans Saints for six-year veteran linebacker Dannell Ellerbe and a 2015 third-round draft pick. The deal made the disgruntled Wallace expendable, and Miami later traded him and a seventh-round draft pick to Minnesota for a fifth-round draft pick.

Stills started only six games last year but had 63 receptions for 931 yards and three touchdowns.

Miami freed up even more space by trading Wallace, who was due to make \$9 million this year. He led the team with 10 touchdowns in 2014, but feuded with the coaching staff.

## Saints, RB C.J. Spiller agree on 4-year deal

METAIRIE, La. — The New Orleans Saints and free agent running back C.J. Spiller agreed to a four-year contract on Friday, a move that bolstered a backfield which also includes Mark Ingram and Khiry Robinson.

Spiller, 27, has spent his first five NFL seasons with the Buffalo Bills, showing the ability to pile up yards as both a ball carrier and receiver out of the backfield.

His best season came in 2012, when he rushed for 1,244 yards and six touchdowns to go with 459 yards and two TDs receiving. He followed that up with 933 yards rushing and 185 yards receiving in 2013, but played in only nine games last season because of a shoulder injury, finishing with 300 yards rushing and 125 yards receiving.

## Harvick wins pole for Phoenix Int'l Raceway

AVONDALE, Ariz. — Kevin Harvick once again showed how dominant he is at Phoenix International Raceway with a pole-winning run Friday at the track he has mastered.

Harvick has won four of the last five NASCAR Sprint Cup races at Phoenix, and a record six for his career. He'll start first Sunday after earning his first pole at Phoenix in his career.

Harvick, winner last week at Las Vegas, turned a lap of 140.751 mph in his Stewart-Haas Racing Chevrolet to win the pole.

Joey Logano qualified second in his Team Penske Ford with a lap at 140.543. He was followed by Jamie McMurray, Matt Kenseth and Ryan Newman.

Brad Keselowski qualified sixth and was followed by Carl Edwards and Kurt Busch, back from a NASCAR suspension in the first three races of the season.



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# Indiana's chances take a hit

The Associated Press

There's always talk this time of the college basketball season that the conference tournaments — especially in the power ones — are nothing more than reasons for, as the late Marquette and Utah coach Rick Majerus used to say, “four-day cocktail parties.”

Yes, they are fun and great reasons for alumni to get together in a city that usually has multi-star restaurants.

But the tournaments are the chance for those teams that didn't have great regular seasons to improve their résumés and impress the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee.

Take Indiana, for example. The Hoosiers entered the Big Ten Tournament with a 19-12 record and a résumé that wouldn't exactly assure a place in the 68-team field.

They beat Northwestern in the second round, not a great win in itself but a chance to face No. 8 Maryland in the quarterfinals. A win there over a team with an RPI in the top 10 would be why coaches never want to get rid of the tournaments.

It didn't happen for the Hoosiers on Friday and a 75-69 loss might not be enough to get them that bid. Indiana started the day with an RPI of 53, a ranking behind other bubble teams such as Oklahoma State, LSU and Old Dominion.

Tom Crean stated his team's case, just as he did after the win over Northwestern.

“When you look at the body of work and factor things in — I really hope our league gets factored in,” he said. “Obviously, there's a lot of really good teams in this league. What I'm encouraged about now (is) we're getting better.”

**ACC aches:** It's been pretty much a given for a while now that the Atlantic

Coast Conference would have a great chance at having two No. 1 seeds — Virginia and Duke. Both of those teams lost Friday, Virginia to North Carolina, and Duke to Notre Dame in the tournament semifinals.

Suddenly, Arizona, which advanced to the Pac-12 championship game, and Wisconsin, which is in the Big Ten semifinals, are very solid contenders along with Villanova, which is in the Big East final, to join top-ranked and undefeated Kentucky as No. 1 seeds.

Virginia has lost two of three and the Cavaliers are trying to assimilate leading scorer Justin Anderson back into the lineup after he missed eight games due to a finger injury and an appendectomy. They gave up an uncharacteristic 71 points in the four-point loss to North Carolina, which shot 55 percent from the field.

“They showed great heart and fight to claw their way back into it, to have a chance to maybe tie it or extend the game,” Virginia coach Tony Bennett said. “So I like that. But what we try to hang our hat on was really porous.”

**Tough road:** Success in a conference tournament doesn't always translate into waiting for word on Selection Sunday.

Take the Auburn Tigers. They beat LSU 73-70 in the Southeastern Conference quarterfinals, their third win in as many days in Nashville, Tenn. The run is most probably over for the 13th-seeded Tigers because top-ranked and undefeated Kentucky is up next in the tournament. The trio of wins gives Auburn a 15-19 record and even a win over the Wildcats wouldn't be near enough to earn an at-large berth.

The only way Auburn will keep playing is to win the SEC tournament and that would mean five wins in as many days.

The team Auburn beat Friday is definitely on the bubble. LSU (22-10) has lost two of its last three and coach Johnny Jones knows his Tigers don't control their own destiny anymore.

“We have been in a tough conference and we're hopeful on Sunday that our name is called,” Jones said.

**Longest wait:** There can't be many long fingernails left around the Murray State basketball program.

Last Saturday, an excruciating seven days ago, the Racers lost 88-87 to Belmont in the Ohio Valley Conference Tournament championship game. The loss ended Murray State's 25-game winning streak and was its first to an OVC team this season.

What has most pundits saying there's little chance for an at-large bid is that the Racers' RPI is in the low 60s and their strength of schedule was 233rd out of the 351 Division I schools.

Plan B? Every regular-season conference champion gets a bid to the NIT so they have that going for them.

**Honest Ed:** Providence coach Ed Cooley had just gone through an excruciating 63-61 loss to No. 4 Villanova in the semifinals of the Big East Tournament. He was asked if the tough loss would help the Friars with their seeding when the field is announced.

“First of all, I don't know what that committee thinks. I really don't,” Cooley said. “All I can tell you is we're playing pretty good. We're excited to play next week. I don't know the ins and outs. That's why people are paid to bracket it the right way, fair and equitable.”

“I don't know. We're just excited to be playing. Just invite us to the dance so we can have a party.”

# Senators hold off Islanders

The Associated Press

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — The Ottawa Senators have been on the type of roll that just might propel them into the playoffs.

Matt Puempel and Kyle Turris scored second-period goals, and backup Andrew Hammond made 34 saves as the Senators beat the New York Islanders 2-1 on Friday night.

Ottawa improved to 9-1-1 in its last 11 games to remain within striking distance of Boston for the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. The Senators trail the Bruins by five points with both teams having 15 games remaining.

“We need to keep stringing wins together to give ourselves a chance,” said Hammond, who improved to 9-0-1. “The biggest thing for us is we stuck to our system, and I think we frustrated them a little bit.”

The Islanders lost their third straight at home, including Tuesday's 2-1 defeat to the New York Rangers, and a 5-3 setback against Carolina on Feb. 28. They are 23-11 at Nassau Coliseum this season.

**Stars 4, Capitals 2:** Vernon Fiddler notched a goal and an assist, and visiting Dallas scored three power-play goals to beat Washington.

Shawn Horcoff and Tyler Seguin added man-advantage goals, and Colton Sceviour also scored as Dallas completed its season-high, five-game road trip with three straight victories. The Stars won four of five overall.

The three power-play goals are the second most the Stars have scored in a game this season. They netted four in a 5-2 victory over Winnipeg on Jan. 31.

**Blue Jackets 5, Oilers 4 (SO):** Alexander Wennberg scored the winning goal in the fifth round of the shootout to lift host Columbus over Edmonton.

Wennberg, who scored his first NHL shootout goal on his third try, also had two assists for the Blue Jackets, who ended a five-game losing streak at home.

Fellow rookie Marko Danon had a goal and an assist, and Cam Atkinson, Artem Anisimov and Scott Hartnell scored for Columbus, which has won its last three.

**Ducks 2, Wild 1:** Jakob Silfverberg had the go-ahead goal and an assist, and John Gibson stopped 32 shots, helping visiting Anaheim end a three-game losing streak with a victory over Minnesota.

Francois Beauchemin scored first for the Ducks, who improved to 27-1-7 in one-goal games this season, including three such wins against the Wild.

Zach Parise had a power-play goal for the Wild, who had a late flurry over the final 96 seconds after goalie Devan Dubnyk was pulled. But Gibson made four saves during that stretch, giving a big lift to the Ducks after allowing six goals two nights earlier.

**Flames 6, Maple Leafs 3:** Sean Monahan scored twice in his first career three-point game, and host Calgary used a four-goal first period to beat Toronto.

Monahan has 10 goals in his last 13 games to move into a tie for 11th in the NHL in goals — one behind Evgeni Malkin and Corey Perry.

It was a big win for the surging Flames, who are 5-0-1 in their last six games. Calgary moved into second place in the Pacific Division, one point ahead of Vancouver, which has one game in hand.

# Westbrook puts up another triple-double

The Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — After yet another triple-double, Russell Westbrook was nitpicking.

The electric point guard collected his sixth triple-double in eight games and scored 15 of his 29 points in the fourth quarter, helping the Oklahoma City Thunder pull away Friday for a 113-99 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves.

He also had eight turnovers, something he addressed after the game.

“I do know one thing, I need to stop turning the ball over, I can tell you that much,” he said. “It's frustrating trying to make passes and turning it over, but at the same time, we're winning. I'll go back to the drawing board and take care of it.”

All Thunder coach Scott Brooks sees is success.

“He is just displaying his all-around game and doing it at a consistent level,” Brooks said. “It seems like every night, he is right at those numbers, and those are signs of a very special player.”

Westbrook checked out with 2:13 remaining, seemingly a rebound short of the feat, but a scoring change gave him his 10th rebound to go with 12 assists.

He has eight triple-doubles this season and 16 in his career.

“I just take notes of what he's doing and what it takes to get to where he's at right now,” said Minnesota rookie Andrew Wiggins, who scored 19 points. “He works hard. He's competitive. He's a great player. I just truly watch him. He's always in attack mode. He never takes a play off. He's always improving his game.”

Enes Kanter had 23 points and 15 re-

bounds, while Dion Waiters and Mitch McGary added 12 points apiece for the Thunder.

**Hawks 96, Suns 87:** Paul Millsap scored 23 points and Atlanta made five three-pointers in the final 6:38 to pull away from host Phoenix.

Kyle Korver added 14 points for the Eastern Conference leaders.

**Nuggets 114, Warriors 103:** Kenneth Faried had 24 points and 17 rebounds, Randy Foye hit three crucial three-pointers and Denver rallied to win while visiting Golden State rested several of its top players, including Stephen Curry.

The Nuggets pulled off an impressive double this week — beating Atlanta, the Eastern Conference leader, on Wednesday and now the Warriors, who are on top in the Western Conference. Denver also improved to 5-2 since interim coach Melvin Hunt took over for Brian Shaw.

**Raptors 102, Heat 92:** Kyle Lowry scored 19 points and host Toronto beat Miami for the first time in more than five years, ending a 16-game skid against that particular opponent.

DeMar DeRozan added 18 points, Lou Williams had 14, Amir Johnson 13 and Greivis Vasquez 12 for the Raptors. Their previous victory over Miami was a 111-103 home win on Jan. 27, 2010. Injured Miami forward Chris Bosh had 24 points and 18 rebounds for the Raptors in that game.

**Mavericks 129, Clippers 99:** Chandler Parsons scored 22 points, Tyson Chandler had 14 points and 12 rebounds for his 26th double-double and Dallas

routed visiting Los Angeles.

Parsons made five of six from three-point range for a team that has been in a prolonged shooting slump to help Dallas win by 30 after sitting for two days on a 33-point home loss to Cleveland.

**Trail Blazers 118, Pistons 99:** Damian Lillard had 28 points, including five three-pointers, and Portland built a big lead in the first half and handed visiting Detroit its ninth straight loss.

LaMarcus Aldridge added 22 points for the Blazers. They have won two of three since losing starter Wesley Matthews to a ruptured Achilles tendon.

**Celtics 95, Magic 88:** Evan Turner scored 16 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter and host Boston overcame an 11-point deficit to beat Orlando.

Turner scored 24 points in the second half to help the Celtics win their third straight and fifth in six games. They also extended Orlando's road losing streak to 10.

**Hornets 101, Bulls 91:** Gerald Henderson scored 20 points, Mo Williams added 18 and Charlotte used a big second-half turnaround to beat visiting Chicago.

The Hornets overcame a 19-point, first-half deficit.

**76ers 114, Kings 107:** Robert Covington scored 24 points and host Philadelphia overcame an 18-point, third-quarter deficit to beat Sacramento.

Nerlens Noel added 16 points and 12 rebounds to help Philadelphia win for the second time in its last seven games. The 76ers are 15-50.